

## FAST ... OR FEAST? (Mk. 2:18-22)

The Pharisees and the disciples of John were annoyed with Jesus for eating with the publicans and sinners in the home of Levi, the tax-collector. He answered, v.19 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. <sup>20</sup> But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. <sup>21</sup> No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. <sup>22</sup> And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.

... Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ... *That* was how things were! Everyone knew and understood you don't fast at a wedding ... you eat your fill! A wedding is a celebration! It lasted for seven days, and it was an occasion in which the whole community participated. Often, the bride and bridegroom grew up together, their families lived in the same town or village ... and a wedding was a special time to for them all.

Once the bridegroom arrived, the celebrations and the feasting began. In fact, the rabbis had rules forbidding wedding guests to fast ... You might wonder why there had to be such rules *not* to fast, but it was because of a certain type who would want to use the occasion as a "look at me" opportunity ... I'm fasting, I'm 'holier than thou'! ... Actually, it's so emphatic, - there was to be no fasting at the feast, v.19 *Can the children of the bridechamber fast...? ... they cannot fast.* It's not allowed ... If you are invited to the feast, you've got to eat.

It comes across sometimes as if some Christians almost feel it's not right to enjoy yourself ... There is almost something unspiritual/carnal about it! But, Solomon tells us there is *a time to weep, and a time to laugh* (Eccles. 3:4). His father, David, sang about rejoicing through the majority of his psalms. ... There is nothing wrong with a Christian having a smile on their face, and enjoying themselves. Sometimes I think some of our brethren in the Reformed circles are afraid to smile in case they look too much like charismatics! ... But you can't talk about the things of the Lord with a 'dourness' and then expect people to think you are happy in Him! Paul told the Philippians, 4:4 *Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.*

So, these Pharisees who were judging Jesus ... and who had influenced the disciples of John ... they were fasting for show. ...

They were trying to ‘kid on’ as to how ‘broken’ and how holy they were ... but it was nonsense, - it was all for display! ... And that is why Jesus was being so emphatic in v.19, *they cannot fast* ... and especially *not* at such a happy time when the Bridegroom was present!

Now, the Messiah is never called the bridegroom in the Old Testament, - He is in the New Testament (e.g. Mt. 25), but not in the Old. However, throughout the Old Testament there are many examples that use the imagery of the Bridegroom and the Bride to express God’s relationship to His people ... For example, we have the Song of Solomon, and many mentions by the prophets of the marriage relationship relating to God and His people.

So, the message Christ introduced to these Pharisees and disciples of John was simply an opening up of the concept from the Old Testament Scriptures that the Bridegroom, - the Messiah, - had come ... and He was standing in front of them! He had arrived, as He had already said in the synagogue at Nazareth when He read the Scriptures from Isaiah, *Lk. 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me.*

... And since Jesus had arrived, they – the Pharisees and the disciples of John, - were out of touch because they had not believed! And because of that, their religious system was bankrupt and behind the times ... They were looking for the Messiah, and He was standing in front of them! They were pursuing a perception of the Messiah that didn’t exist because their concept had all kinds of human limitations that had no correspondence whatsoever with the Messiah, - Christ, - Who was speaking with them.

An example of how the Jews could get their approach to the Messiah so wrong was even displayed through the lips of Christ’s own disciples when He was about to leave them from the Mount of Olives, *Acts 1:6 Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?* ... For all their days, - up until those precious few years they had spent with Jesus, - they had been taught the Messiah would be a great man who would be raised up from among the people of Israel and champion the cause by driving out the invader and settling the people as their own masters in their own land. ... It is hard to ‘shake off’ what you have been brought up to believe, and that was how the Pharisees could not accept Jesus ... They could not recognise Jesus as the Messiah ... and consequently, they reckoned He was a pretender sent to delude them.

They thought He was trying to establish another religion ... a *false* religion. That's why they believed they had to stop Him! They didn't see it ... that Jesus is the Truth, and the Life, and the only Way to God! They would not for a moment acknowledge Him as the Messiah, the Son of God, the Saviour, the Man of Sorrows in Isaiah. ... The Bridegroom had come, but they could not celebrate because they would not recognise Him for Who He was.

That is how it continues to be in Judaism today. And sadly, that is also how it is with many in our families, our friends, and our neighbours. They cannot accept the notion of Christ coming to be our Saviour, and how we must trust in Him for our salvation. ... Like the Pharisees, the veil is over their eyes.

Then, in relation to the Bridegroom, Jesus continues, <sup>20</sup> *But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.* This is obviously in the future, *the days will come* ... but not too far into the future because it is referring to when the Bridegroom will be *removed*, - ἀπαίρω, suddenly and violently snatched away. Isaiah had prophesied, *53:8 he was cut off out of the land of the living.* The day was fast approaching when the Messiah would be oppressed and afflicted, and brought as a lamb to the slaughter (Is. 53:7). Jesus knew all about it for His Father planned it in eternity! He told them how He would be taken and mistreated, and killed. ... He had only recently commenced His public ministry, but He knew how it would end ... This is the first reference to His death in the Gospel of Mark.

What will happen then? Notice the 'but', *But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.* In 'those days' they will fast. Those will be sad days. They will fast, but it won't be put on for 'show', but it will be heartache and grief.

... Remember how Mary Magdalene wept for Jesus in the garden, outside the tomb ... Remember how the disciples met inside the house, with the door locked, after Jesus had been crucified ... Remember how Jesus met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus ... and they are heartbroken. They trusted Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah, but the chief priests and the rulers handed Him over to the Romans who nailed Him on a cross where He had died. All their hopes had been crushed. And in their sadness they returned to their home in Emmaus, and they invited Jesus in because it was late in the day ... He went in and sat down, and obviously there was food in the house but it seems the two men were so heartbroken they were not interested in eating a meal, - and because of their sorrow they fasted ...

That was what Jesus had prophesied, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

This was *their* house with *their* supplies, yet notice how it was Jesus, the Guest, Who broke the bread and gave to them ... otherwise they wouldn't have eaten because they *were* fasting due to their sorrow and grief.

However, these Pharisees and disciples of John to whom Jesus was speaking were completely out-of-touch with the Gospel. They had erected their barricades of religion to block their vision of recognising God's grace in Christ. He preached repentance, and yet they saw no need of it for themselves. They held to the trappings of their religion, whereas He spoke of the need for grace in the heart. They loved the approval of men, whereas Christ offered the approval of His Father, They had ritual ... He offered a relationship.

For further clarification, Jesus added, <sup>21</sup> No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.

In the days before synthetics, the ancient natural fabrics, - such as linen, cotton, and wool, - would have shrunk after a while, especially in the washing. ... When a hole would appear in the clothing, there would have been no sense at all in cutting a new piece of cloth and sewing it into the old ... because when the patch would be washed a few times, it would start to tear itself away from the old.

Using this illustration, Jesus told them, you cannot mix the new unshrunk material with the old worn-out shrunk garment. In other words, the old covenant has been superseded and replaced by the new. Judaism's rituals and ceremonies were old and worn-out, and you couldn't patch their empty holes with a new piece from the Gospel. Salvation is not a 'patch-up job'! Jesus did not come to merely fill in what had become inadequate through their keeping of the Law ... He came, instead, to be the Fulfillment of the Law (Mt. 5:17) ... He came with a message, - the Gospel, - to complete it altogether!

His Gospel is not a gospel anyone can hope to achieve through their own goodness, their own righteousness. His Gospel is of repentance and forgiveness by grace ... It cannot be mixed with religion, or men's traditions. It is not faith by a religion, it is faith by a relationship. ...

By the way, the old garment is not referring to the pure, and righteous, and holy Law of God given to Moses, - there was nothing wrong with the old Law, it was man's observance of the Law that made it of none effect. It had been changed into something God never intended it to be, - a 'man-made religious obstacle course' that only the self-righteous believed they could achieve.

But no, the religion that had been polluted by men's imaginations was being purified by the Lord Jesus. He was reclaiming it for His Father. ... The old garment of the dead religion of Judaism relates to the gospels of so many, even in our own times, who try to do some religious 're-stitching' by adding in their own bits and pieces, - a bit of this and a bit of that, a bit from here, and a bit from there ... No, the only Gospel that saves is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that is set forth from this Word of God.

Some people think all they need to do is include Jesus in their lives, - they can keep everything they want to keep, and simply add Him on. No, that won't work. The Gospel is unique. It has no room whatsoever for anything other than the grace of God ... for it is the grace of God *alone* that saves.

And there is not one salvation for the Jews and another for the Gentiles ... There is not one salvation for the Roman Catholics and another for the Baptists, and the Methodists, and the Presbyterians ... Neither is there a separate salvation for the Muslims and the Hindus, and whoever else ... There is only one salvation, - one way, - to God, and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And just to make sure there was no room to 'wriggle', and they had no excuse to misunderstand, Jesus said to those Pharisees and disciples of John, <sup>22</sup> *And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.*

You read about this in Joshua 9:4-13. They would take a goat, and kill it, they would then take the hide of the goat, use the neck as a spout, sew up the places where the legs were and any openings and then they would have a goatskin 'pouch' ... and they would fill it with new wine. They would leave it for a while and allow the dregs (which gave it the bitter taste) to sink to the bottom and settle there. Then they would pour the new wine out of one skin into another new skin and they would keep pouring it and pouring it and each time they would pour it, more of the dregs would remain in the bottom ...

From those dregs, they would make such things as vinegar. But, once they would get rid of the dregs, eventually they would have a clear and pure wine. That was the process. It was really important that the skins for containing the wine would be absolutely supple to contain the wine in good condition.

So then, Jesus was illustrating how if you had old skins lying around that had been used and reused many times, they would have become so brittle they would crack and you would lose your wine. He was telling them how futile it would be to pour the new message of the Gospel into old cracked and 'done out' wineskins of the Jewish religion. Judaism simply could not contain the new wine of the Gospel. Once again, the Gospel stands alone. It is incompatible with other religious systems ... The Gospel is a foreign ingredient that does not mix with anything for there is none other Name under Heaven whereby men and women, boys and girls must be saved ... only through the most precious and ever-worthy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

The religion of the Pharisees, and even the religion of the disciples of John was made of 'the old skin' that could not contain the Gospel. But, rather than believe and receive, they held on to their dead, brittle, tattered, useless old religious wineskins and they refused the offer Christ was extending to them.

If you are trying to live by a religion ... it will keep you away from Christ. If you are trying to bottle up a religious concoction to satisfy the thirst of your spiritual needs, you will be sorely disappointed. It will keep you under its spell for it keeps you from looking to Christ. Tragically, such dead religion nullifies the spiritual senses and draws the unsuspecting into a lost eternity. ... Many people have their own form of religion, where Jesus is merely an add-on, and that is the great mistake. ... He is not an 'add-on' ... He is a 'take over'! Do you know, - are you sure you know, - Christ as your Saviour?

Make sure ... because just as He took the time to speak to those Pharisees and the disciples of John, He is also taking the time to speak to you today. Amen.